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ABSTRACT

Societal trends and personal characteristics are facilitating movement from corporate to self-employment. The entrepreneurship movement is characterized by several trends that are influencing the way people work: such as younger workers expecting shorter-term commitments to work, expanding career options, opening of worldwide operations, and technological advances that make it possible to work at home. Successful entrepreneurs usually are perceptive, innovative, creative, self-directed, action oriented, confident, collaborative, persevering, and decisive. Entrepreneurship education extends beyond technical and financial considerations. Strategies that educators can use to promote higher-order thinking, in-depth understanding, and high-quality achievement (behaviors and skills associated with entrepreneurship) include the following: (1) situate learning in the context of its real-world application; (2) require in-depth understanding of a concept or issue; (3) provide learning activities that enable students to engage in their preferred styles of learning; (4) make classrooms student centered; (5) integrate content and context; (6) become a coach and mentor rather than a dispenser of knowledge; (7) require collaboration and teamwork; (8) require students to achieve high intellectual standards; and (9) engage students in exploration, inquiry, problem solving, and reflection. (Contains 11 references.) (KC)

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

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PRACTICE APPLICATION 1999

BRIEF NO. 3

Entrepreneurship Success Stories: Implications for Teaching and Learning

An explosion in entrepreneurship will characterize the first decade of the 21st Century. This *Practice Application Brief* describes the societal trends and personal characteristics that are facilitating movement from corporate to self-employment. It reports on successful entrepreneurs and suggests practical teaching and learning strategies for promoting entrepreneurial behaviors and skills in the classroom.

The entrepreneurship movement is characterized by several trends that are influencing the way people choose to work. For one, employer-employee contracts have become short-term commitments. Today's adolescents and Generation Xers have little trust in the traditional employment arrangement that guaranteed job security for hard work and loyalty. They have seen their parents lose jobs due to corporate downsizing and restructuring (Love 1999). Second, career options have expanded. Nontraditional occupational choices are increasing (ibid.). Alternative work arrangements that allow for part-time and contingent workers are providing options for flexibility and autonomy. Third, businesses have fewer operating constraints. Government deregulation has opened national borders for commerce. Communication technology has opened the four-walled office operation with systems such as the World Wide Web forging global connections (Bronner 1998). Finally, society has legitimized "working at home." Affordable, user-friendly office technology has made it possible for people to conduct business from any number of locations, including the home, in a professional, cost-effective manner (Grossman 1998).

Characteristics that Facilitate Entrepreneurship

The following characteristics are commonly attributed to entrepreneurs: perceptive, innovative, creative, self-directed, action oriented, confident, collaborative, persevering, and decisive.

Perceptive. An entrepreneur, as defined by Bygrave and Hofer (1991) is someone who "perceives an opportunity and creates an organization to pursue it" (Roggenkamp and White 1998, p. 3). Entrepreneurs are able to learn from real-world experiences and transfer that knowledge to new situations. Harold S. Blue, chairman of Proxymed Inc., a health-care information services company in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, was only 10 years old when he started his first business, a neighborhood snow removal service. At 16, he set up a drugstore in the lobby of a new, unrented doctor's building, which soon brought in renters for the owner and led to a booming business for himself. In his 20s, Blue started a chain of discount drug stores, a generic drug distribution company, and a number of other health-care businesses. Entrepreneurs like Blue typically want to be their own bosses, and they have a knack for detecting business opportunities (Bowers 1998).

Innovative. Entrepreneurs are idea people. They are higher-order thinkers who are able to link their substantive knowledge and in-depth understanding to practical applications in the real world. While a student at Harvard Business School in Boston, John Chuang drew a connection between his expertise in using the Macintosh computer and the business community's need for Mac-trained personnel. With two student partners, Chuang established a temporary employment agency, MacTemps, Inc. Today, it has international offices in 35 cities and a 1998 sales projection of $130 million (Phillips et al. 1998).

Creative. There are many dimensions of learning and doing. Creativity is facilitated when a person is able to pursue an individual style of discovery. Billy Baldwin, who battled dyslexia throughout his school years, was taught by his favorite teacher to capitalize on his strengths rather than focus on his disabilities. Having a passion for business enterprise, Baldwin and his brother established a mail-order cookie company in New York City called Cookie Island. To market the cookies, Baldwin created "Legends of Cookie Island" and the "Adventures of the Dough Tribe," tales that brought the cookies and the characters they represent to life (ibid.).

Self-directed. Entrepreneurs have learned to take responsibility for their own career development. While working as a waitress, Gayle Ortiz decided that she wanted to own her own business. So she baked croissants at home in between waitress shifts, which she sold, saving the profits until she had enough to leverage a $20,000 loan. "With the money, Ortiz and her husband opened up a French bakery that has since been remodeled six times and grown into a 10,000 square foot gourmet palace with $4 million in annual sales" (DeLollis 1997, p. 2).

Action oriented. Entrepreneurs are risk takers. They refuse to remain in jobs that bring boredom, burnout, and frustration. Entrepreneurs are also lifelong learners who see the value of continuing education as a way to acquire or update their skills. Roggenkamp and White (1998) report on the action-oriented responses of four nurses who, opposing a reduction in inpatient acute care hospital services, elected to offer patient care through private enterprise. Lacking necessary business skills, several of them returned to school. They recognized the need to integrate business and nursing principles.

Confident. Entrepreneurs are able to strike out on their own because they have confidence in their abilities and believe that they know the best way to do something (Bowers 1998). They have been empowered by positive coaching and feedback. Tom First recalls that he was never without a job, working from childhood. He attributes his self-confidence to the coaching and support of his parents, who told him that he could accomplish anything. During a summer break from college, First applied his propensity for cooking to create Nantucket Nectars, a drink he designed and peddled in Nantucket Harbor with a college friend. Since their graduation from Brown University, the classmates built a company that now employs 130 people and has a projected sales goal for 1998 that exceeds $50 million (First 1998).

Collaborative. Collaboration with others is a powerful way to enhance knowledge and facilitate entrepreneurial success. Dalia Almanza-Smith got the idea of starting a postcard advertising company in the United States after she saw a promotional postcard in Spain. When she returned to the United States, Almanza-Smith learned, much to her dismay, that two other vacationers has stumbled onto the same idea while in Europe and had established their own businesses. Determined to move forward, Almanza-Smith contacted the two owners and persuaded them to join forces to form a single business, calling it Go Card. Today, Almanza-Smith has taken her part of the business and forged another collaborative effort—a partnership with Network Event Theater from which she distributes her postcards (Ojito 1998).

Persevering. Authentic achievements reflect high intellectual standards, which cannot be obtained without perseverance. Sandra Mercado, a 26-year-old entrepreneur who grew up on welfare, has persevered in her efforts to achieve a better life than her mother. Mercado became valedictorian of her high school class and a graduate of the University of Illinois. These academic achievements gave her the foundation from which to pursue her employment goals. Using a popcorn recipe passed down by her grandmother, Mercado established Popcorn Paradise, Inc., a retail venture located in Chicago's Lincoln Park. Her ability to overcome adversity and adapt to life changes came into good use when fat-free snacks became popular. Faced with this dilemma and with an unexpected lack of foot traffic during the day, Mercado immediately made adjustments in her recipe and extended store hours (Ojito 1998).

Decisive. The ability to make decisions and solve problems is a key to the success of every enterprise. An entrepreneur must be able to analyze and interpret a problem situation, consider a number of solution options, reflect upon their viability, and make a decision regarding a course of action. After the collapse of communism in Poland, Rafal Dylak saw a market for products that were eliminated or not provided to citizens during the communist regime, namely city maps. Dylak enlisted the help of three partners to create a map-producing company. These entrepreneurs, through successful problem solving, were able to capitalize on a previously proven idea rather than reinventing the wheel (Perlez 1998).

Teaching and Learning Practices

"There were 1 million start-ups in the world last year, and anyone who wants to be involved in such a start-up has a lot to learn" (Bronner 1998, p. 4). Although college courses, programs, and majors on entrepreneurship are becoming more popular than the MBA programs of 10 years ago, entrepreneurship interest is not limited to the college student. "In a 1994 Gallup poll, 7 out of 10 American high-school students said they wanted to start their own business" (ibid., p. 2).

Entrepreneurship education extends beyond learning about price-earnings ratios, financial planning, and securing venture capital. It involves engaging students in classroom activities that lead them to develop knowledge and skills through learning processes that they can emulate in the workplace. Following are several strategies that practitioners can use to promote higher-order thinking, in-depth understanding, and high-quality achievement—behaviors and skills associated with entrepreneurship:

- **Situate learning in the context of its real-world application.** Harold S. Blue was *perceptive* because he was able to ground his learning in the context of real-world situations, acquiring new knowledge that he was able to transfer to similar situations.
- **Require in-depth understanding of a concept or issue.** John Chuang was *innovative* in that he was able to draw upon the ideas of a discipline (technology), explore connections with workplace applications, and devise ways to address issues of the real-world.
- **Provide learning activities that enable students to engage in their preferred styles of learning.** Baldwin's *creativity* was enhanced through his freedom to pursue his unique learning style and draw upon it to produce "cookie" tales.
- **Make classrooms student centered.** Student-directed classrooms place the responsibility for learning on students. They afford students opportunities to be *self-directed*, like Ortiz, in establishing their own goals and strategies for achieving them.
- **Integrate content and context.** The integration of academic and vocational knowledge was a necessary element of the nurses' *action-oriented* response to a values conflict. The success of their self-employment endeavors required the nurses to integrate their technical knowledge of nursing with academic knowledge of accounting principles.
- **Become a coach and mentor rather than a dispenser of knowledge.** Tom First was *confident* because he received support and encouragement from his parents. Coaching and scaffolding can be a powerful tool in helping students to construct knowledge.
- **Require collaboration and teamwork.** It was through a *collaborative* relationship with other entrepreneurs that Almanza-Smith was able to establish a successful business.
- **Require students to achieve high intellectual standards.** The accomplishments achieved by Mercado reflect her *persevering* approach to high-quality achievements that have utilitarian and personal value beyond the mere documentation of competence.
- **Engage students in exploration, inquiry, problem solving, and reflection.** Dylak was able to be *decisive* in because of his ability to explore, inquire about, construct, and reflect about a solution to a problem of the real world.

These techniques offer insight into new ways of teaching and learning that are appropriate for entrepreneurship education.

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